



GREATER GRACE
CHURCH

MIDWEEK FILLUP | THE STUDY OF ACTS ACTS 15 | THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Objectives of the Chapter

1. To understand the basis for Salvation under the New Covenant.
2. To examine how disagreement in the Church should be handled.
3. To review how the Gospel was spread throughout the World.

Background: (From Back To The Basics Membership Orientation - The Church Covenant Handout)

- **Abrahamic Covenant.** This unconditional covenant, first made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, promised God's blessing upon Abraham, to make his name great and to make his progeny into a great nation. The covenant also promised blessing to those who blessed Abraham and cursing to those who cursed him. Further, God vowed to bless the entire world through Abraham's seed.

Circumcision was the sign that Abraham believed the covenant (Romans 4:11). The fulfillment of this covenant is seen in the history of Abraham's descendants and in the creation of the nation of Israel. The worldwide blessing came through Jesus Christ, who was of Abraham's family line.

- **Mosaic Covenant.** This conditional covenant, found in Deuteronomy 11 and elsewhere, promised the Israelites a blessing for obedience and a curse for disobedience. Much of the Old Testament chronicles the fulfillment of this cycle of judgment for sin and later blessing when God's people repented and returned to God.
- **New Covenant.** This covenant, found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:40 promised that God would forgive sin and have a close, unbroken relationship with His people. The promise was first made to Israel and then extended to everyone who comes to Jesus Christ in faith (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15)

Summary of the Chapter

God had always planned to offer salvation to the whole world (Genesis 12:3). He had always planned to first set aside a particular line of Abraham's descendants to demonstrate to the world the importance of worshiping the holy God and to provide the Messiah—God the Son come to earth in humanity—as a sacrifice for the sins of the Jews and the Gentiles. When this expansion into the non-Jewish world begins, Jewish Christians who have lived a particularly devout life have a difficult time accepting that the purpose and necessity of their separation from other nations is over.

The earliest Christians were Jews. And even as believers in the Lord Jesus, they still considered themselves Jews under a covenant relationship with God – a covenant relationship that involved circumcision. So, it was only natural that they would expect all believers to follow

the Old Testament covenant requirements. And that was OK until the church began to reach beyond a Jewish audience and into the Gentile world. It was then that requiring Gentile converts to become circumcised became a point of contention.

It would seem most of the early work done among the Gentiles did not advocate circumcision for them. Acts 11:19-21 is the first recorded intentional outreach to the Gentiles, taking place in Antioch. Nothing in that passage is said about circumcision. But in Acts 15:1 some Jewish believers from Judea come to Antioch and attempt to push circumcision as a requirement for salvation. That this created an uproar in the church at Antioch, would indicate that this church had never required it, at least for the Gentile believers.

Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, representing the church at Antioch as well as the greater Gentile mission. They meet with the apostles and elders there to settle this question. Must the Gentiles be circumcised in order to be saved? And the answer coming from this first church council was that no, the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised. They were essentially free from the old covenant obligations.

This marked a major milestone for the new church. No longer were they a sect of Judaism, even though the church still contained thousands of practicing Jews. Instead, they were a multi-ethnic body of believers. And circumcision was no longer a sign of their covenant relationship with God. While circumcision remained a contentious issue for many Jewish believers, the church, as a whole, no longer recognized it as a distinctive, or requirement, of the faith.

Outline

1. Division Among Believers (15:1-2a)
 - a. Legalism versus Faith
 - i. Disagreement between Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas
 - ii. Jewish Tradition vs. Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. Delegation to Jerusalem (15:2b-21)
 - a. Delegates were from churches in Jerusalem and Antioch
 - b. Case Pled
 - c. Elders Conferred
 - d. Peter Interceded and Paul & Barnabas Expounded
 - e. James Advised
3. Letter to Gentile Believers (15:22-35)
 - a. No need for circumcision
 - b. New Regulations
 - i. Purpose of these regulations
 - c. Letter Delivery
4. Second Missionary Journey (15:36-41)
 - a. Paul and Barnabas' Disagreement

